

Big Van Vader: The Bully of the Woods

By - MacArthur & Skolnick

On the surface, the object of professional wrestling is a rather intriguing art: punch, kick, apply holds, and do moves to your opponent that appear to cause pain, yet rarely cause much more than a sting. Given this basic truism, Big Van Vader is the poorest example of a quality wrestler to work in this country since Stan Hansen.

Top wrestling journalists call Vader the best big man in the business. Some have even said he is the best big man of all time. But, anyone who says he is anything more than a stiffer, shorter, less charismatic version of Sid Vicious is deluding themselves. Many say he brings realism to his matches. Tell that to his opponents who risk serious injury every time they step into the ring with this irresponsible man. The injuries caused by Vader's incompetence, and total disregard for the welfare of his opponents, include severely bruising Sting's ribs, breaking Davey Boy Smith's nose, breaking the vertebrae of jobber Joe Thurman, and a medical report on Cactus Jack that guaranteed Jack's physician would be able to make a balloon payment on his yacht. After two brutal matches with Vader, there was speculation as to whether Cactus Jack, who has made a career as a bump artist, could ever return to the ring. The second bout, which was glorified for its intensity, will be most remembered as the match that put Cactus Jack out of commission for several months when Vader recklessly power bombed Jack on a concrete floor. Vader's stiff style is praised by many for its realistic look. Instead, it should be condemned for its end results.

Apparently, WCW feels Vader's work is laudable as, rather than admonish Vader for the havoc he has wrecked on several wrestlers, they rewarded with him a six-figure contract. The career and health of Thurman is of little or no consequence to the company: he was a jobber, and at that, one who had only been in a couple matches. Thurman was not missed and replaced by another guy willing to put his body on the line: Cactus Jack. Jack is tough man who won't complain about the treatment he received from Vader as he puts his body on the line on regular basis. This is the same wrestler who has been hit in the head with bottles and garbage cans. The same man who had his face caught in barbed wire. The same man whose posterior meets the concrete in almost every match he wrestles. According to the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter*, Jack asked Vader to work a stiff match with him. It is doubtful that the treatment Jack received was what he had in mind when he made that request. As for Sting and Smith, neither injury was serious enough to keep them out for long. Sting took a month off, but was back for the War Games last year. Smith bounced right back. Unfortunately, it may take a Thurman-like injury to a superstar the caliber of Sting or Smith - an injury that actually costs the company money - for WCW officials to wake up, take notice, and stop Vader.

Vader's talent has been suspect from his initial appearance in WCW three years ago. Remembered by many as the AWA mid-card non-talent, Leon "The Baby Bull" White, has proved once again that a good gimmick can blind the public, as evidenced in Japan, and often people who should know better, as is more than apparent in the United States. Vader's success in Japan is based on a gimmick and the fact that Antonio Inoki put him over as a monster when White debuted

with the gimmick. No one ever noticed if he was able to work because Inoki was doing the selling. The win over Inoki proved to be the only feather Vader would ever need in Japan to get over with an audience. Already over with the Japanese crowd, Vader found it of little use to learn how to work. Instead, he must have decided to work every match as if it were a shoot. He did learn, with great aptitude, how to rough up fellow wrestlers.

Vader's WCW debut in 1990 was met with little response from the public, despite his unique gimmick. That was enough for WCW, however, as by 1992, he became their Heavyweight Champion, despite two important facts: First, his only claim to notoriety in WCW was he injured Sting's ribs; a result of his own incompetence more than anything else. Second, he was not over with the fans as a heel. In fact, he just wasn't over. Since becoming the WCW champion, on three occasions no less, Vader has done little more than leave a trail of injured opponents and negotiate a contract that, given Vader's history as a draw in the United States, could only be euphemistically termed ridiculous.

The concept of pro wrestling is to make it look legitimate without actually hurting, injuring or maiming your opponent. That takes talent; talent Vader obviously doesn't have. It takes little talent to physically destroy an opponent. Any thug can pick up a chair, crack it on an opponent's back and leave a welt the size of Dusty Rhodes' stomach splotch. Any thug can give a person a black eye. Any thug can jump off a rope and break a man's ribs. That doesn't take talent, it just takes reckless disregard and a lack of respect for a fellow human being. Professional wrestling is a tough

sport and injuries are bound to occur. That's the nature of sport. Professional wrestling, however, is not a shoot. If it were, there would be but a few healthy wrestlers left after a few months. The problem is, Vader either thinks it is, or figures he is so tough that he needn't be concerned with the health of his opponent. Either approach in the world of professional wrestling is not only unacceptable, it is dangerous.

There are several wrestlers with a style similar to Vader's who rarely hurt their opponents. When the Road Warriors broke in, they were brutally stiff, according to the wrestlers who worked with them. It took some time, but their stiffness changed. They still worked realistic looking matches, but they learned how to avoid hurting their opponents. Vader's been wrestling for nearly eight years and has yet to learn this. Can someone who is unable or refuses to learn the intricacies of working without injuring truly be called a top caliber wrestler? Wrestling in Japan demands a stiffer style than in the United States and talented wrestlers learn to adapt. Steve Williams and Terry Gordy work stiff in Japan. But when was the last time you read about the opponents of either suffering any kind of injury in a U.S. or, for that matter, Japanese ring? Perhaps Vader could learn a lesson from them. Undoubtedly, Vader is a tough man who can handle himself in a fight, but just like fans were eager for Gordy and Williams to come to WCW and straighten out the Steiners, perhaps it is time for someone to straighten out Vader.

Admittedly, Vader has some talent. He is a large man, with great strength and surprising agility. His psychology, when placed in the ring with a good opponent, can be quite good. To his credit, his matches with Sting, Cactus Jack and

Smith have been entertaining. A moonsault for a man his size is truly incredible. Yet, in every match that hardcore fans have swooned over, Vader has worked incredibly stiff or been carried by a talented opponent. In either instance, it hasn't been Vader's ability to work that has drawn attention, it's been his gimmick or his ability to beat an opponent senseless. The fact is, Vader isn't one of the top 10 workers in the United States. In fact, he barely cracks the top 10 in WCW. It takes more to be considered a top worker than merely brutalizing an opponent. What distressing is those who should know better, particularly those in power positions, fail to see this.

In 1990, Professor Boris Malenko stated into the *Wrestling Observer Newsletter*, that your opponent is your partner. You put your trust in him with every move. If he screws up or fails to protect you, not only could you be injured, but your career could be over in the blink of an eye. That blink of an eye almost ended the career of Cactus Jack when Vader failed to protect him. That blink of an eye broke Thurman's back when Vader showed no regard to Thurman; a man with a family to support. That blink of an eye happens every time Vader steps into the ring with his malevolent attitude towards anyone who happens to be standing in the ring opposite him. The time has come for WCW to stop Vader from destroying any more wrestlers. Before Vader steps into the ring again, WCW must change his attitude, if not for the sake of their wrestlers, then to protect the company. If Vader is unwilling to work properly, then he should be dismissed. WCW should have no problem convincing Vader which option is preferable. After all, if Vader's reckless behavior continues, it will catch up with him. Perhaps in the blink of an eye.

Sidelines

Thanks To Jeff Cohen for the plug and Scott Greene, Mike Lederkramer and Steve Corlett for their help promoting *Wrestling Perspective*. Their help, and your readership is most appreciated.

Next Issue will be our summer double issue with part one of a lengthy interview, or should we say mini-series, with Smoky Mountain Wrestling promoter and World Wrestling Federation manager, Jim Cornette. The interview features Cornette's insights into running a successful regional promotion, the state of pro wrestling and his falling out with Stan Lane. This issue also includes an interview with the legendary Bullet Bob Armstrong, the Phantom's first in a three part series on wrestling's angels, Michael McGowen on violence in professional wrestling, and much more, including something worth waiting for. If your subscription expires with this issue, renew today. *Please note, if a 1 appears on your address label, you must send an additional \$1.25 to receive this double issue.*

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per issue. While this is a modest increase, it is also a necessary one due to increased printing costs as a result of our efforts to make *Wrestling Perspective* more reader friendly, increased telephone costs which are necessary to bring you our unique interviews, and general inflationary costs since our last rate increase over two years ago. With this rate increase comes our promise that we will continue to provide you with 12 pages of the best writing on professional wrestling every month, plus informative and entertaining interviews from a different viewpoint. Our new rates will take effect with Issue #38. Subscribers may renew at the old rate of \$1.25 per issue up to \$15.00 per year until September 30, 1993. Issue #37, a double issue featuring interviews with Bob Armstrong and Jim Cornette, will be at the old rate. It will, however, cost \$2.50 as it is a double issue. As we have for the past three and a half years, we thank you for your support. Without you, the thrills and dreams of publishing *Wrestling Perspective* would never have materialized. To subscribe to *Wrestling Perspective*, as well as send your comments, suggestions and letters to: *Wrestling Perspective*, PO Box 401, Camillus, NY 13031-0401. Please make checks and money orders payable to *Wrestling Perspective*. Checks returned for non-payment will be subject to a \$12.00 surcharge.

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available for \$2.50 and issue at PO Box, 2371, Jamaica Plains, MA, 02310.

If You Like To Write and you love wrestling, then the *Wrestling Perspective* submission manual is the next thing you need if you want to write for *Wrestling Perspective*. All you have to do is send us a note, and we'll send you a copy. It's really that simple.

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Wrestling Perspective: The Interviews Volume I is a wonderful 60 page book chronicling the interviews that appeared in *Wrestling Perspective* during our first 30 months. Where else can you find a collection of interviews with such diverse performers as Billy Graham, Stan Lane (a two-part interview from 1991), Ivan Koloff, Rockin' Robin, Tommy Young, Jim Duggan, Larry Sharpe, Special Delivery Jones and Angelo Poffo. This is a fantastic collection of insight, humor, and intrigue, that you are bound to read from cover to cover to cover to cover and over again. *Wrestling Perspective: The Interviews* is available for \$10 for subscribers and \$12 for non-subscribers. Quantities of this collection are limited, so send in your order today.

In Perspective: Stan Lane

Over the past 14 years, Stan Lane has been one of the premier wrestlers in the United States. As a member of the Fabulous Ones, with Steve Keirn he enjoyed tremendous regional, and some national success for several years. In 1987, he would team with Bobby Eaton to achieve national success and critical acclaim as a member of the third, and most talented incarnation of the Midnight Express. After a falling out with WCW management in 1990, Lane worked independent dates with manager Jim Cornette and then resurfaced as member of the Heavenly Bodies, with Tom Pritchard, once Cornette got Smoky Mountain Wrestling off the ground. In May, Lane left the profession due to reasons he elaborates on in this interview conducted by Paul MacArthur on June 14, 1993. Additionally, Lane discusses his future plans, his views on wrestling and some of his more memorable moments in the sport.

Wrestling Perspective: Why did you decide to leave Smoky Mountain Wrestling?

Stan Lane: Basically, because after about 14 years in the business, I accomplished everything that I felt that I wanted to accomplish and I felt like it was time, now that I'm rapidly approaching middle age, I'll be 40 years old in August, I just figured it was time to change gears and maybe head off into a new career direction.

WP: Have you made any decision on what career you'd be looking at, or are you just in a transitional period right now?

SL: As a matter of fact, right now I'm heavily involved with Ric Flair's Hawaiian Tropic franchise in this area, coordinating the weekly Miss Hawaiian Tropic Bikini Contest and also

emceeding every week. This job, it's a dream come true as far as being surrounded every week by beautiful women (laughs). "The Gangster of Love" has finally found his ideal job (laughs). This is only a temporary thing, a 12 week contest and we'll be going down to Ft. Lauderdale for the national finals, and the international finals will be held in Melbourne, Australia. I don't think I'll make that, but in the meantime, I'll be tied up with this for the next several months. In addition to that, we are also, Ric Flair and I, are also negotiating about the possibility, or I should say probability, of me buying into the new gym franchise up here and also going into the day to day operations/management position. He's already got Ric Flair's Golds Gym here in Charlotte, which is one of the most successful Golds Gyms to date. Immediate future plans call for a Greensboro, North Carolina Golds Gym in the next several months and I'm going to be more than likely involved. I may decide to stay here in Charlotte, but then again, I'm kind of leaning towards going back to my home town in Greensboro and getting involved with the gym there.

WP: So is it really strenuous working with the Hawaiian Tropic women?

SL: Well, it's a different kind of strain (laughs). It's fun really. We do a weekly contest at George Knights All Sports Cafe, which is located right besides Ric's gym, so it works out good. George is a sponsor and also the Miller Genuine Draft Light people are also sponsors. We've had tremendous crowds there. We average from 10 to 15 lovely ladies per week and it's a lot of fun.

WP: Sounds like a good career move.

SL: (Laughs) Why didn't I do this years ago?

WP: The rumor about you becoming an exotic dancer, true or false?

SL: Yeah, that's false. I did do that several years ago. That was right after Jim Cornette and I left WCW back in the winter of 1990 and the spring and summer of 1991. I did do some exotic dancing, if you will (laughs). It's a fun thing to do, but it's certainly not a career type job. You can't do it forever. It just did it basically for the fun of it. The money is good, but it's not an every night type of situation. I averaged dancing about twice a week. It's nothing you're going to get rich at, but it's a fortunate opportunity to meet a lot of beautiful ladies once again and watch them scream (laughs).

WP: So are you going to go back to lifeguarding?

SL: Lifeguarding? (laughs) I kind of doubt it. The lifeguarding days were fun. I go boating a whole lot there, Ric Flair and I were out boating this past Sunday. He has this 35' Sea Ray. I've got a 28' Sea Ray and we go out on the lake here quite a bit and party and cruise around. So I'm still out in the sun quite a bit. Probably my next name will be Mike Melanoma from all the excessive sun. But as to lifeguarding, no I don't have any plans to do that.

WP: Are we looking at your retirement at this point?

SL: Well yeah, that's a really quote, huge word to say. Like you know it sounds so final. But yes, as of right now, I'm prepared to walk away from it. That's not to say that maybe down

the road I may do a show here and there. But the way I'm feeling now, I think it's time to branch off in a new direction. I've been very, very lucky in the business, been very, very fortunate. I've done a lot of things that most people haven't. I want to walk away from it on the top. I don't want to start getting older and maybe start sliding down to a low spot and risking the possibility of getting hurt. I don't want to be walking around 10 to 15 years from now all crippled up with arthritis because I stayed in it too long and got banged up to the point where I would be in bad shape physically the rest of my life.

WP: You remained relatively injury free during your career, didn't you?

SL: I've been fortunate. I've had a lot of little small injuries, but never any broken bones. I've got a bone spur on my right hip and my right rotator cuff hurts, but it's starting to feel a whole lot better now that I haven't had a wrestling match in several weeks. I'm starting to mend up and heal up all the little small bruises and the aches and pains are starting to go away. I've got an ankle that was sprained rather severely several times in my career that sort of makes a clicking noise when I walk (laughs). Besides that, nothing really major. Of course, my partners have sustained a whole lot worse injuries. I remember Steve Keim, my partner in the Fabulous Ones, had six pins put in his ankle. Bobby Eaton has had broken bones. I think his ribs, his collar bone and what not there. So, yes I've been very lucky. Sooner or later your luck runs out though. Sooner or later it's going to catch up to you. I'm a firm believer in your body only has a certain number of bumps in it. When you reach that plateau, when you get up towards the end of your career, you're going to get

hurt.

WP: You're very lucky after having worked with people like the Road Warriors.

SL: Yes, exactly

WP: They weren't the most careful people in the world?

SL: Well, when Steve and I, and also Bobby and I, worked with Hawk and Animal, they were just so big and strong, it wasn't like they were out to hurt somebody. It was really just realizing how strong they were and being so much bigger than we were, I guess you could term us as being like rag dolls (laughs).

WP: When discussing why you were leaving SMW, some things have been written that you were reluctant to blade, as well as like you said, you only have a certain number of bumps left. Do you think blading, now with AIDS and hepatitis rather prevalent, is something that should become a thing of the past?

SL: Yes, I definitely believe that also with the AIDS problem running rampant around the country. Besides the risk of contracting a potentially dangerous disease, I don't have any desire to have a forehead that looks like a rhinoceros. I mean I'm just not into that. Besides that, over the past five years, I think so many fans have become smart to what's actually happening that it doesn't really mean anything anyway. I hate to see our business turn into a freak show with guys who are just like circus geeks who go out there and disfigure themselves in barbed wire matches. I'm hearing now about guys over in Japan that are doing matches with the ring on fire and they're being burned, they're burning themselves, they're wrapping sticks of barbed wire... mutilating themselves. Where's it

going to end? To me it's not really wrestling, it's just sickness. It's like they're prostituting their bodies, maiming themselves just to make money. It's sad.

WP: In some cases, Kevin Sullivan in SMW for example, it seems like they are going over the edge.

SL: Yeah, they had this one little kid in there, I felt sorry for him. I think he was like 19 years old, or around that age. 21 or something at the most. I think he did a situation where he required 108 stitches to get his wounds to close and I was sitting there thinking, "My God this is sad." I won't mention names, but a lot of people there really were getting off on it. I don't know why. But I guess different strokes for different folks.

WP: With people smartening up to blading, do you see any purpose in it any more? Does it make any sense at all?

SL: No. No, not really. For years and years, I was always asked if us guys used capsules. That's what a lot of people thought was used. If you're just out for the visual effect of it, why not do that? I've been involved with wrestling, with karate, for years and years. I've been in street fights and stuff and been involved in several other things and I've never, ever, in my entire life seen anybody in a street fight or in a karate match or boxing or whatever, get their forehead cut. So to me it doesn't serve any function. I've seen noses bleed. I've seen lips cut. I've seen eyes cut, cheeks cut, but never somebody's upper forehead. So to me it's just an expose anyway.

WP: In the NBA, the moment you're cut, you're pulled from the game until it's closed up.

SL: Exactly. They've got all their trainers in rubber gloves and boxing referees now use rubber gloves, latex gloves. It's a pretty scary thing when you've got four or five guys in a street fight match and everybody's bleeding on everybody else. That, to me, you're just asking to die. It's a very high risk. You know life's risky enough when you're doing all the traveling, all the driving, all the flying. If you want (laughs) to be a daredevil, then go ahead and do it. I'm not one of them.

WP: Was traveling part of the reason you decided to get out?

SL: That was part of it too. Living in Charlotte, it was rough as far as driving up to the Smoky Mountain area. It was pretty hard on us. When I say us, I mean me and Tommy Young when he was involved with it and when he got let go, then Bobby was involved for several months. That made it a little bit easier as far as taking turns driving, but the trips up there from Charlotte averaged about 250 miles. A lot of trips were upwards of 400 miles one way and were not talking 400 miles of four lane interstates where you put it on cruise control and you cruise. We're talking about mountain roads and in a years time I went through two sets of brakes. So the wear and tear on your car traveling those mountain shots is probably about 10 times greater. After Bobby went back to WCW, it more or less left me stuck here. So I had a decision to make, whether I wanted to move up there and for the money involved, I didn't want to do that. I decided maybe it was time to hang the tight's up.

WP: Nothing like getting stuck behind a semi on a two lane.

SL: (Laughs) Exactly. Especially when you're going up hill at a 60 degree

angle (laughs).

WP: Was it impressed upon you that it would be good to move?

SL: Yeah, yeah it was suggested to me. I did consider doing that. After I weighed all the variables, I just decided it was not what I wanted to do. After being gone from my folks for more or less 10 years, I finally now, being back here in the Charlotte area, I'm finally close to my parents. They're in Greensboro, about 90 miles and they're not getting any younger and I'd like to spend as much time with them as I can and it was just nice to be back home. You know, instead of seeing them twice a year during the holidays, seeing them every few weeks. I knew if I moved away up there again, I wouldn't see them at all because I'd be working all the time. I'd be a long way off. That had a big bearing on the decision.

WP: Getting away from the nomadic lifestyle?

SL: Yeah. You know being in the business is glamorous. It's terrific flying around all these towns and stuff and meeting people. It's fun. But just like any other business, after a while, it ceases to be fun and it's just a job. If you're doing all the miles that I did, sooner or later something's going to happen. You're luck's going to run out again. You could be in a wreck or something. Of course you could be in a wreck anywhere, a half a mile from you're house. So that not really everything. It just didn't really want to move up there.

WP: Plus the more you drive, the lazier you get and you're more prone to accidents.

SL: Yes. Living here, driving those 700 mile, or 800 mile, round trips, I was like getting in a lot of nights at four

o'clock in the morning, just dead tired, almost dozing off. I got in some nights at 5:00 am, 5:30 am. It's too much.

WP: What's the morale like in SMW?

SL: I think it's basically good up there. Most of the quote, major league players, have all gone now, but I think he's trying to get his own stars, maybe with guys that are basically happy to be there and happy to be working. You know, that's great. There's a definite need for territories like Smoky Mountain Wrestling. I wish there were about a dozen of them for guys who haven't had a chance to be a wrestler, who want to do it, who want to take a shot at it. It would be whole lot better for them, if there were a bunch of territories to go through like it was in the old days. That was great. Right now, you've got two major promotions to go to, and they aren't doing all that great anyway, and you've got Smoky Mountain and that's about it. So I wish there were more of them.

WP: Unless you like \$25 payoffs in Memphis.

SL: Yeah, exactly (laughs) Smoky Mountain is a little bit better than that (laughs).

WP: What do you think the chances of success are for SMW?

SL: Well, when I left there, I've been gone for a couple months, all their spot shows were doing well. Some of the major, major cities weren't drawing all that great. But it takes time to get things going. I was there a year, and I saw the houses get better and better, so hopefully, for everybody's sake it will be very successful.

WP: If SMW fails, given that it is about the best run independent we've seen in a long time, what do you think that

means to the business as a whole?

SL: I think that would be a very, very negative sign. I think if any smaller territory is going to survive, I think Smoky Mountain would be it. All the variables are there for success. The region they are in is a region that is maybe five to ten years behind the times as far as wrestling goes. What I mean by that is, there are still a lot of the quote old time hardcore wrestling fans there. That is a good plus for them. I think the management is good there. Jim is certainly dedicated to making it work. The crew he has there works hard. They're happy to be there. They're happy to have jobs, regular jobs. So all the ingredients are there for success. If they failed, I would have to say that definitely would look very, very bad for the business as a whole.

WP: You said the fans are different. Are they the type like the old days where they will attack the heels.

SL: Oh yeah (laughs). There's still the hardcore believers up there. I think up in the mountains and hills up there. That's not a put down to them, they're old style hardcore fans. They like it. They haven't been totally blitzed by the media in the past several years with the WWF and all the hokey poky stuff. A lot of them don't have cable up there. They're just like the old style fans are, a lot of them are.

WP: Do you think it's good, bad, indifferent? I know from a personal standpoint it is probably a little scary dealing with that old style again.

SL: Yes, from a heel standpoint it's definitely a lot more dangerous. You put yourself on the line every night, especially with the hot angles Jimmy does. He wants to draw money, he wants to be successful, but he is one of the few promoters now that likes to put

a lot of heat on heels, which makes the fans mad, makes them want to come out and see the heels get beat. But it also can be dangerous for somebody whose got a knife in his pocket, or maybe just got a little carried away and wants to do something. So, yes it can be very dangerous. The security up there is not great, so if that situation did arise, then I don't know if it could be quelled in time or not. I just certainly hope that situation never happens to anybody there. But the environment for it up there is certainly inviting. A bad situation could happen at some point.

WP: Shortly after you left, a situation arose where Cornette had to be escorted across county lines. Did you have any incidents while you were there?

SL: There were a lot of matches where an over zealous fan had to be escorted from the building. There was a guy I remember one night who had a 12 inch bully knife on him in the front row and had verbally told the people around him that he was going to cut somebody. So that's scary.

WP: What was it like to be surrounded by some of the talent in SMW, Tom Pritchard and later Bobby Eaton in particular.

SL: It was fun. I've been around talented people all my career. It wasn't anything new. All my partners in the past have been very talented. We're talking about Bryant St. John, Steve Keim, Bobby Eaton, Tom... they're all very good workers. They are dedicated, but it was no different there as far as that goes. It was a lot harder because of the long trips.

WP: Was it good to work with Bobby again?

SL: Oh Yeah! Definitely. He's a super

guy. One of the nicer guys in the business. A very down to earth kind of guy who loves wrestling. It's his life. He goes out there every night and works very hard, whether there are 10,000 people in the building or 10.

WP: What makes a wrestler good?

SL: I think I'd have to say a person who can make the fans sit there and get the fans into the storyline. It's kind of a lost art now. You've got guys out there now that will go out there and do a match that's been planned out and laid out in the back. You know everything laid out and coordinated, the moves, OK, this and that will happen. But the dying art is a true worker who will go out there and take the feedback from the crowd and do it in the ring. Have the fans and either make them mad, make the sad, make them glad and controlling all those thousands of fans out there. If there are thousands of fans in the building, I don't think there are anymore. But in the older days when you were going out there, when it was not planned out... you'd go out there and do it by feel. You know what I'm saying.

WP: Adaptability.

SL: It's a dying art. Those are the kinds of guys that I would term the true workers.

WP: So it may not necessarily come down to ring skill, but someone like a Hulk Hogan who can control the fans emotions?

SL: Yeah, well not so much Hulk either. I mean a guy who can go out there and give the crowd a 30 to 45 minute match that tells a story. Hulk was good as far as doing a pose and the crowd would pop, or doing a facial expression here or doing this and that. But I mean a true worker, who can go out there and by

doing holds, by doing the wrestling skills and the mat work and the high spots here and there and tell a story. The storyline is laid out. The crowd gradually builds up and you bring them and hold them at that level. Then you bring them back down. It's like a storyline.

WP: *The Flair/Steamboat confrontations.*

SL: Exactly. Definitely.

WP: *The Midnight Express/Rock n' Roll Express matches are great examples too. Particularly when you go 45 minutes.*

SL: There you go. There's very few guys now in the business that can do that. There's a lot of guys who can go out there and do fantastic moves. They can do somersaults and flips and all these wild kinds of "high risk maneuvers," as Jim Ross calls them, and the crowd will pop on that. They'll go "ooh" and "ah," but a second later they're like "OK, what's next?" I guess we'll wait for the next flip, handstand or whatever. But there's no storyline being told. There's no soap opera to it. It's more like a circus act. You know the Flying Valentis. They get the crowd to pop and "OK, thank you very much."

WP: *This is a two part question. What's your best memory and worst memory about wrestling?*

SL: I'll tell you a very, very vivid memory for me is when I was just in the business for about six months. I'd left my first territory, which was Amarillo, Texas. I'd been there two or three months and I'd gone to Bill Watts' territory, Louisiana and I wrestled a Superdome show. Being in the business a short while, and being green and you're still scarred and stuff, I remember arriving there and I went to

the dressing room in the back and I walked out there and I saw the ring in the dome. When I saw the enormous size of it, I think there were something like 40,000 fans there, it kind of took my breath. I went "Oh my God. This is amazing." I'd gone from this Amarillo, TX promotion with little small towns, with little small barns and stuff to this huge arena with all these people. It was really mind boggling.

WP: *Did that nervousness stick with you the entire match?*

SL: It would start to wane once the bell rang. I was nervous before matches for probably a couple of years. It took several years. The severity of it was not as great after a while, but you'll get the butterflies in your belly before a match. But, usually once the bell rings, you go out there and start doing your skills, it sort of fades away a little bit. Before the matches is the worst time. You know "OK, you're on next. Get ready." You're walking around backstage, thinking this and that, that people out there are waiting on you, that the lights are going to be on you and stuff. It's kind of an unnerving kind type feeling.

WP: *Any negative memories?*

SL: Well I'm sure there's a lot of them. I never really thought about it. Not any one thing stands out in my mind as far as being real negative. I guess, I could probably say one thing that will probably be ingrained in my memory forever, was my very first territory, which I mentioned earlier was Amarillo, Texas. This was back... I left Greensboro in January of 1979. I packed up my car and I drove 1,500 miles to Amarillo, which was my first place. The territory had just been bought, I think from Dory Funk Sr., by Dick Murdoch and Blackjack Mulligan.

They were in there trying to get it going and they had been down, sort of bad for awhile. They were trying to get it built up and do well there. I went out there and I was there about three months and I left. But the week before I did leave, I was involved in an angle with Skandor Akbaar. He threw fire on me. He burned me really bad. I had a blister on my stomach and my chest about a foot wide. I mean huge blisters, second degree burns and about four days later they, Murdoch and Mulligan, approached me again, and more or less told me the same thing was going to be done again. The same angle was gong to be done and I was green and starting out and a long way from home and I was scarred and stuff and I was thinking, "God they're going to burn me again and I'm already burned." So a lot of the older guys who were like looking out for me, guys like Tank Patton and Bill Howard told me, they said, "Kid, don't go through that. Go in there and tell them that you're sorry, you can't do it." So I did that (laughs). My vivid memory of this is at the Amarillo building that night when I told them no. I declined. And Mulligan who is about 6'7" or 6'8" and 300 lbs. and Murdoch who is a tough guy in our business too, 6'4" 275 lbs., hearing me who'd been in the business for about two and a half months, took me in this room there, locked the door behind them and proceeded to just berate me like, "You little punk, you've got a bad attitude" this and that, "we ought to slap you" you know all this kind of stuff. I was scarred to death. I thought these two big guys were going to kill me. And this went on for about five minutes. I mean they called me every name in the book, "You're a nothing happening..., you've got a bad attitude, we bring you out here and give you a chance and you do this and that" and I was in there

going "Oh my God (laughs) somebody save me, these guys are going to kill me." But they didn't they just scarred me. To make a long story short, I left about three days later. I packed my car and left. So that's probably one of the negative (laughs) stories that I do recall quite vividly.

WP: Which do you prefer, heel or face as a worker?

SL: I always prefer heeling. I just started off heeling. I was trained by a heel. Ric Flair trained me. I always enjoyed that persona more. I just found it more natural to be cocky. I guess maybe that's more my natural personality. I guess it's easier for me.

WP: Can Ric Flair do it again?

SL: Well, as far as working a building, he's definitely still got it. I think the problem is going to be, will the powers that be that are up there who are

controlling the all booking, will they allow him to do it? There's so much politics and jealousy and egos that go back years and years and years. So it's a matter of if he will be allowed to run with it. If he is allowed, I would say if anybody could draw money down there, he can. I would love for him to have one more good run and hang it up. But we'll have to wait and see.

WP: On an unrelated topic, what does the "Gangster of Love" recommend in the day of AIDS?

SL: (Laughs) Well I guess you can sum that up in one word: condoms. They're just a necessary evil. I never had liked them, but you've got to use them. It's a fact of life now. I think, myself being the "Gangster of Love," that abstinence is just a little too harsh. I'll just settle for condoms.

WP: It's either condoms or monogamy.

SL: Monogamy's a little harsh for me

too. Variety if the spice of life.

WP: I'd say that's a good way to sum it all up. Thanks for your time once again.

SL: It was my pleasure. I enjoyed it.

Looking for more Stan Lane? If you enjoyed this interview with Stan Lane, you will no doubt enjoy the Stan Lane interview published in Wrestling Perspective in October and November of 1991. In that interview, Lane discusses how he got started in the profession, working out with and being trained by Ric Flair, what it was like to be in the Fabulous Ones, the Midnight Express and much more. You can obtain this interview by ordering Wrestling Perspective • The Interviews for only \$10, or you can order Issues 7 & 8, from Volume II, available for \$1.25 each or \$2.50 for both issues.

The Wrestling Perspective Back Issue World Tour Continues • We're still clearing out our inventory of back issues to give you the perfect opportunity to fill those gaps in your *Wrestling Perspective* collection. All back issues are available for \$1.25 per issue, unless otherwise noted. Below is our back issue inventory; supplies of some issues are limited, so please list alternates in case selections are out sold out.

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Da Bruiser

By - The Phantom Of The Ring

He was billed as "The World's Most Dangerous Wrestler" and spent the greater part of his career living up to that moniker. William Frederick Afflis, better known to millions of wrestling fans as Dick the Bruiser, was born on June 27, 1929 in Lafayette, Indiana. A legitimately tough kid, he spent much of his childhood in trouble with the law before channeling his energies into athletics and eventually earning all-state honors as an offensive tackle and defensive end at Jefferson High School. This earned him a scholarship to Indiana University, where he was reputedly thrown out after only one week for punching an assistant coach. The Bruiser would attend four other universities, including Purdue, where he made second team All-Big Eight at offensive tackle in 1948. Eventually he would wind up at University of Nevada-Reno, where he would spend the rest of his collegiate life. Life at Reno wasn't too bad: he earned first team All-Pacific Coast honors at offensive tackle in 1949 and 1950 and worked in several clubs in the area during the off-season as a bouncer. His enthusiasm for beating up wayward patrons became legend in the Reno Police Department and even landed

him an offer to go into professional boxing, which he turned down.

His football career continued into the NFL as a 16th round draft choice of the Green Bay Packers in 1950, where he would be an offensive guard until being cut in 1955. The Bruiser would have us believe that he was cut for being too rough, at least that was his story in *Sport Magazine*. The real story was, although he had good size for the time at 5'11" and 255 lbs., Bruiser's skills were somewhat lacking and he could not secure a starting spot on the line. The Packers also held against him his off-season participation in professional wrestling, having been trained by Len Levy and Tony Stecher in 1952.

Once he made his choice to become a full-time wrestler in 1955, it took him 18 months to reach the main events. He was unlike any other wrestler: big, powerful, mean, and extremely nasty. He also seemed nothing short of unbeatable because he had a build quite unlike any other wrestler at the time. His neck and shoulders were huge, and when combined with his demeanor, gave the impression

of a very powerful maniac.

Bruiser also did something else that wrestling fans had not seen before: along with Killer Kowalski, Bruiser pioneered the now familiar wrestling tactic of refusing to sell. He would not sell to television jobbers even early in his career, and after a while, would not lose to anyone save for bizarre countouts or disqualifications. He was quoted in *Sport* as saying that he spent a lot of time building up his persona and he wasn't going to let some nobody come along and ruin it. In this case, he meant it.

Nothing enhances a reputation like an incident everyone can remember. The Bruiser was fortunate enough to have several of these to his credit. He was involved in the worst wrestling riot ever to shake Madison Square Garden in 1957, and the irony of the situation was that he wasn't the one who started it. Bruiser was teamed with Dr. Jerry Graham against Antonio Rocca and Edouard Carpentier. Throughout the match, Rocca kept getting on the good doctor's nerves by making him look unnecessarily foolish. The more Rocca pranced and

danced, the hotter Graham became. Graham made the fatal mistake of communicating this to the Bruiser, who simply stored away the information for later use. After the match, Rocca and Graham continued their argument, which came down to blows and the audience rapidly became involved in the outcome of this battle. Suddenly, Rocca felt two large paws at his back and the sensation of flying as Bruiser threw him over the ropes and into the audience. Graham then belted Carpentier and the riot was on. It took eight cops to subdue the Bruiser who continued to struggle, even after he was brought to the station. The upshot of all this was fines for Graham, Rocca and Carpentier, and a lifetime suspension from New York for the Bruiser. Needless to say, after this hit the papers, Bruiser sold out every arena he appeared in for the next six months.

The Bruiser's second brush with destiny came in 1963. Johnny Doyle was seeking to invade NWA controlled Detroit with his "outlaw" WWA. A strong main event was needed: enter Alex Karras, all-pro defensive tackle for the Detroit Lions serving a one-year suspension from the NFL for gambling. Karras was given a hasty training course and put into the ring with surprisingly credible results for someone so green. Doyle's idea was to match Karras with the Bruiser and rake in a really big gate, thereby making it easier to promote in Detroit. To make things even better, Doyle told Bruiser to get some pre-match publicity. He got more than he bargained for: Bruiser walked into Karras' Detroit restaurant for what was supposed to be a fake fight, only no one told the Bruiser, or if they did, he forgot. After all, it was hard being the Bruiser. One thing led to another and Bruiser threw a barstool through a window, police were called,

and before the night was over, nine of them were injured, Bruiser had a broken nose, Karras needed stitches, and a sellout at Cobo Arena was assured.

The match was almost a total shoot. Bruiser still enraged because of the bar fracas, threatened to beat Karras' face in. As Bruiser was scheduled to win, Karras was told to do the best he could and hold the Bruiser off. The match ended with Bruiser kneeling on a pinned and bloody Karras. Bruiser then capped off a perfect evening by punching out a few fans as he fought his way back to the dressing room.

Bruiser's proclivity for fighting fans resulted in quite a few lawsuits and a wide berth from most promoters. The reluctance to book the Bruiser on a regular basis was the main reason he purchased the Indianapolis-based WWA in the late Sixties. At least he'd have a place to wrestle regularly. Promoters saw the Bruiser as a fantastic drawing card, but not as a regular diet, and rarely did he work an area more than a couple of weeks at a time.

The fans loved the Bruiser because he would do anything. When he was a heel, he would tear up the programs and break the pens of kiddie autograph seekers. He would sometimes borrow an umbrella or purse to use in smashing a foe. Chairs, tables, nothing was unused in a Bruiser match. One night in St. Louis he even tossed Bulldog Brower out of the ring, dragged him up the aisle and out to the front of the building, where he then proceeded to smash Brower's head into the side of a bus parked curbside. All of this, of course, in full view of a couple of thousand fans who followed outside to watch the fun.

The Bruiser even found a novel way to use the television promo interview. When orphans saved their pennies to buy their hero, Cowboy Bob Ellis, a birthday cake and on the verge of presenting it to him, the Bruiser came in demanding to know where the cake was. He then took the orphans' cake, threw it to the floor, and proceeded to grind it into the cement with his heel. He pulled another cake stunt when Wilbur Snyder was being feted with a cake on his birthday. The cake was being served to Snyder by some beauty contest winner when the Bruiser walked in and smashed the entire cake into Snyder's puss. Because the Bruiser wasn't the greatest talker, he often preferred to let his actions speak for him. The results made for great feuds.

In 1968, the Bruiser turned babyface for good, and concentrated on promoting in Indianapolis, where he was especially popular. He raised countless dollars over the years for muscular dystrophy and the Police Athletic League, which often caused the cops to look the other way when the Bruiser got involved in a fracas. Over the years, he formed one of the best known tag teams of all time with the Crusher, and won the WWA tag title in 1983, with Bruno Sammartino as a partner; the only time Sammartino ever held a tag title. He also put over then son-in-law Spike Huber as a major contender and did a clean job in the ring for son Karl, who wrestled under the hood as the Masked Strangler, in a WWA title match.

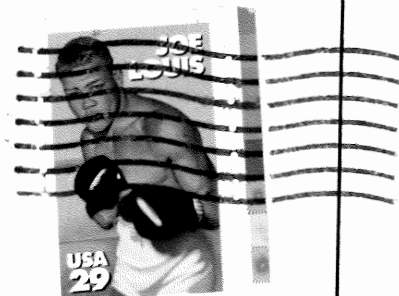
Dick the Bruiser, passed away on November 10, 1991 from internal bleeding brought about by a ruptured blood vessel in his esophagus. He ruptured the blood vessel while lifting

weights at home, and it was later discovered that the Bruiser was suffering from hardening of the arteries, which contributed to the rupturing of the vessel. I strongly doubt we will ever see his like again in the ring. The Bruiser was not just a mere wrestler; he was a total entertainer who believed in giving the fans their money's worth. He believed in his character; after all, he wasn't just a professional wrestler, he was Dick the Bruiser.

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- The Jim Cornette Interview!
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